

18th August, 2004

The Secretariat,
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee,
Room S1.61, Parliament House,
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Sirs,

Criminal Code Amendment (Suicide Related Material Offences) Bill 2004

We are utterly baffled and bewildered by this proposed legislation. Is the country so awash with people inciting others to commit suicide that an urgent action is necessary? Has the numbers reached such alarming proportion that draconian measures are called for?

Even one untimely death is to be deplored and any civilised society should strive to stop or at least reduce the risk of such premature death. If that is the intention then this legislation is completely the wrong method and will send completely the wrong signal to the community. It appears that this legislation is intended to stop voluntary euthanasia societies and like-minded groups from providing any help or information to persons suffering more than they would care to bear. Despite the protestations to the contrary, this legislation will hinder and hamper such societies because of the wide coverage of the proposed measures. It will give the authorities immense power to charge and harass the most innocent of the societies.

As elderly citizens, we have to question the real motive behind the proposal. Is it to try and prolong the suffering of the elderly and the sick? Is it to glorify suffering and thus push a religious barrow? Is it to shoot the messenger in case the news get out that an uncaring society does not want to help the sufferers? If the Parliament is compassionate, it will legalise voluntary euthanasia and thus make information about suicide irrelevant, unnecessary and redundant. Till then let others, who are more compassionate and more caring, cater to the needs of the hundreds of elderly and sick by informing, advising, helping and generally disseminating facts to educate, assure and assuage.

Modern communication, particularly the Internet, has empowered the disadvantaged, the disabled and the elderly. To put a stop to this free exchange of ideas will be a retrograde step, whatever be the motive. It is censorship at its worst and is unworthy of a democratic society.

Yours faithfully,

K. R. and L. M. Ray